

Health officials stress importance of radon testing for public buildings

by Rachel Madison
STAFF WRITER

Although radon test kits are sold mostly to homeowners, experts say testing businesses and public buildings is also essential. Radon is a radioactive, cancer-causing gas that occurs naturally from uranium in soil. It is found all over the United States and in any type of building. It is also the second leading cause of lung cancer, according to the U.S. Surgeon General.

The Environmental Protection Agency has set a benchmark for radon levels at 4.0 pCi/L, Keyser said. If radon levels amount to more than that, then the EPA recommends a radon remediation system be installed, which can help to eliminate radon in buildings.

Christine Keyser, radon program coordinator at the Utah Department of Environmental Quality, said there is not a requirement in the state of Utah for businesses to test for radon. However, she said it's the smart thing to do.

"I would say wherever people are, then you want to test that place," Keyser said. "If you're breathing the air, it needs to be tested. If you're working in an office that has high levels of radon, then you are at risk. It doesn't have to just be at home."

There are two types of tests that are done to test for radon — short term and long term. Keyser said short-term tests are typically done during a 48-hour time period, and long-term tests are typically done over the span of a year. She said short-term tests give people a "snippet" of the radon levels in their home or business, while long-term tests give more accurate results. Keyser said most businesses and public places do not test for radon because it is not a requirement by law.

The main public place that radon testing is done in schools, Keyser said. Many schools will do short-term testing over a weekend when there isn't a lot of traffic so that doors and windows will stay closed. After 48 hours, the test kit is sent into a lab to be analyzed, she said.

Vicki Rolfe, environmental



Maegan Burr

A radon tester sits behind a wall clock at Grantsville Elementary School Tuesday morning. Radon testing is required in schools but not other public buildings.

specialist for the Tooele County Health Department, said in Tooele County all schools, from elementary to high schools, have been tested for radon. The most recent testing just began at the new Grantsville Elementary building.

"The building was tested years ago and then it burned down, so now with the new school we have to test it again," Rolfe said. "We placed 24 kits in various spots around the school, and in one year we will collect those and send them to a lab. Then the lab will give us results and we'll do a report on the findings."

Rolfe said the health department has never tested any business in Tooele County because it has not been requested. Rolfe

said if a business does want to be tested, all they have to do is ask and the health department will be able to assist.

Keyser said because radon gases fluctuate during different seasons, long-term testing will give the best results.

"If the short-term kit tests high, then we suggest people put a long-term kit in," Rolfe said. "The long-term test will give you all of the seasons of the year, because it's a year-long test, so that way you'll see if there's a spike during a certain time of year."

Keyser said just because one building has high levels, that doesn't mean the building next door will have high levels. Offices that have many rooms or floors

should have a test kit placed in several different offices throughout the building so that each area can be tested.

Keyser recommends any business owner or homeowner test the lowest livable space in their office or home.

"Radon will stay close to the ground," Keyser said. "Up on a third level it's not a problem because it's further away from the soil. If you have higher levels of radon on upper floors, then water, if it comes from a well outside, needs to be tested for radon next."

Keyser also said newly built buildings are more susceptible to radon because of new construction techniques.

"Buildings are tighter than they were in the past," Keyser said. "That is creating a negative pressure instead of a positive pressure, so more air is being pulled out of the building. When you create a negative pressure those gases under our home or office are pulled in through the cracks. We'd like to see builders using radon-resistant construction techniques."

Keyser said this can be accomplished by a simple method of building a vent-and-fan system that will help to suck out radon gases. Rolfe said she hasn't heard of any buildings in Tooele County that have been built to resist radon.

Radon is responsible for about 21,000 lung cancer deaths every year. About 2,900 of these deaths occur among people who have never smoked, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Tooele County residents can visit the health department to purchase radon test kits for \$6. The kits are for short-term tests, meaning they will monitor an area for 48 hours, and then can be sent into a lab for testing. Long term test kits can also be purchased from the health department or www.Radon.Utah.gov for \$24.95, and can be used to monitor a home or office for a minimum of 90 days up to 365 days. Rolfe said the health department can assist with setting up the test kits if needed.

rachelm@tooeletranscript.com

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LaForge honored by Utah Theatre Association

By Robby Poffenberger
STAFF WRITER

Less than four years after closing the curtains on her teaching career at Tooele High School, Carol LaForge was honored last week with the 2012 Utah Theatre Association Award for Outstanding Contribution to Theatre Education.

"It was a big honor. It's always an honor to get acknowledged by the people you work with, even though I'm retired," LaForge said.

The UTA, a group of Theater educators primarily made up of high school teachers from around the state, gives away four awards at its annual conference each year in the categories of Outstanding Contribution to Secondary Theatre, College/University Education, Outstanding Service to UTA, and High School Education. LaForge was this year's beneficiary of the latter.

According to UTA Governing Board member Jim Christen, who is also the director of Musical Theatre Studies at Weber State University, the board reviews a list of people who have given distinguished service to Utah Theater and this year, LaForge topped the voting list.

"They (The UTA Governing Board) wanted to acknowledge Carol for a long and distinguished career of teaching and service in the Theater community in Utah," Christen said.

LaForge also made time at the annual convention — attended by over 2,000 high school students from across the state — to teach a Pantomime class and assist a class in Technical Theatre just as she did while teaching at Tooele High.

LaForge and her students received dozens of accolades over the course of her 35-year reign. During that time, she herself received other accolades, including Extra Curricular Teacher of the Year in '98, Outstanding Teacher award in '03, the Buffalo Wings award given by her fellow peers at THS in '06 and the Tooele District Award given by the Superintendent, also in '06.

Although retired from full-time education, LaForge is hard at work with her LaForge Encore Theatre Company, which she founded immediately after retirement in 2008. She had given community Theater a shot before, staging "Nunsense" the summer beforehand under the moniker of Tooele Community Theatre. Thus far, LaForge's company has staged "Once upon a Mattress," "My Fair Lady," "Annie," "The King and I" and "A Christmas Story" and recently acquired the rights to perform "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" this upcoming June.

However, a problem that has plagued LaForge Encore Theatre Company from the beginning is the lack of a community theater facility to perform in. The group's last production, "A Christmas Story," was performed on the small stage at the Community Learning Center in December, which she found to be very difficult.

"Anytime you work at a place where you have to provide your own seating, it's difficult," she said. "You have to have the audience on levels, and if you don't no one will be able to see. Every parent has been to a school assembly where they were in the back and couldn't see a thing."

LaForge has been hoping for a

community facility since she first began teaching, but said that it is needed now more than ever.

"It's always been a dream of mine to have a community arts center," she said. "I just know the community is ready for that. Just none of us [the Stansbury and Tooele arts councils] know anybody with money, and that's what it's about right now."

Even with that obstacle, LaForge always enjoys going back to the THS auditorium and stages her biggest plays in the summer when the auditorium isn't fully booked. She says the experience is like going home.

LaForge gives 10 percent of the total box office from her plays to the THS drama department every time she performs in their auditorium.

"I know what it was like when I was teaching there and people would use the facility and they would leave a mess and demand and demand, and I want to leave it better than it was when I got there," she said. "I guess it comes from being there all those years and feeling a sense of ownership."

LaForge hopes for a long second career in community theater.

"As long as I am physically and mentally able, I'm going to do theater in Tooele," she said.

robbypoff@tooeletranscript.com



Maegan Burr

Carol LaForge stands near a Tooele High School Drama trophy case while holding her 2012 Utah Theatre Association Award for Outstanding Contribution to Theatre Education. LaForge received the award at the UTA annual convention on Friday.

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